

From: ronaldgminnich@netscape.net@inetgw
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/26/02 3:55pm
Subject: Microsoft settlement

I am a computing professional with 25 years experience. I have worked as both a computer hardware designer and software engineer, specializing in operating systems. I have worked at many different companies in the last 25 years. I have watched Microsoft grow from a vendor of PC Basic to its current monopoly position in the industry. I feel that absent some basic changes your current remedy will leave the US software industry in a very weakened state. In this letter I will focus only on the issue of making the cost of Microsoft software transparent to the user, as well as making its purchase optional.

I am asking that you require that the cost of Microsoft software be a separate line item on ALL computer systems sold with Microsoft software pre-loaded. Currently users do not see the price of the Microsoft software they buy, as the Microsoft software is bundled in. Still worse, they have no option but to buy the software.

I am further asking that you ensure that Microsoft not outsmart the US Gov't again in this matter; the FTC has tried (and failed) several times to resolve this problem. If there is to be a competitive software business in the US, these two conditions are a minimum requirement.

Currently, if I buy a computer system from any major vendor, I am forced to pay several hundred dollars for Microsoft OS and applications software. I have no choice in this purchase. I do not use Microsoft software; I do not want this Microsoft software; I have to erase this Microsoft software every time I get a new computer. In one case I have spoken with IBM about getting a refund on the cost of the Microsoft software. Their response: my only option is to not buy an IBM computer. In other words, Microsoft has left IBM (and many other companies) with no choice but to force customers to pay for Microsoft software, whether the customers want it or not.

This behaviour has almost killed competition in the PC software industry. Years ago, one could buy a computer with a choice of pre-loaded software. No longer. The only option offered by most vendors is Microsoft.

The US gov't has tried, and failed, several times to change this situation. In 1995 the US Gov't thought it had worked out an agreement with Microsoft to force unbundling. The US Gov't was wrong. In fact, the US Gov't has been consistently outmaneuvered by Microsoft. The outcome of the current trial is one of the last chances we have to save Microsoft competition from complete extinction.

There is a precedent for this type of unbundling. You are not doubt familiar with the unbundling of IBM Operating System software from the IBM 360/370 computer systems. That forced unbundling resulted in the creation of credible competition for IBM, and forced the mainframe industry to move forward much faster than would otherwise have happened. Unbundling was tough on IBM, but very good for IBM's customers and US technological innovation.

Please consider my request for unbundling. A strong, competitive US software industry is vital to the Nation's security. Your current plans will leave us with a monopoly provider with almost no competition. At the very least, transparency should be the rule when a computer system is purchased with software pre-loaded.

Sincerely

Ronald G. Minnich
48 Sumac Lane
Los Alamos, NM 87544
505 663 0784

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